



YURI YARMISH

HOW BABY ELEPHANT LEARNT TO DANCE



Illustrated by Irina Mishyna



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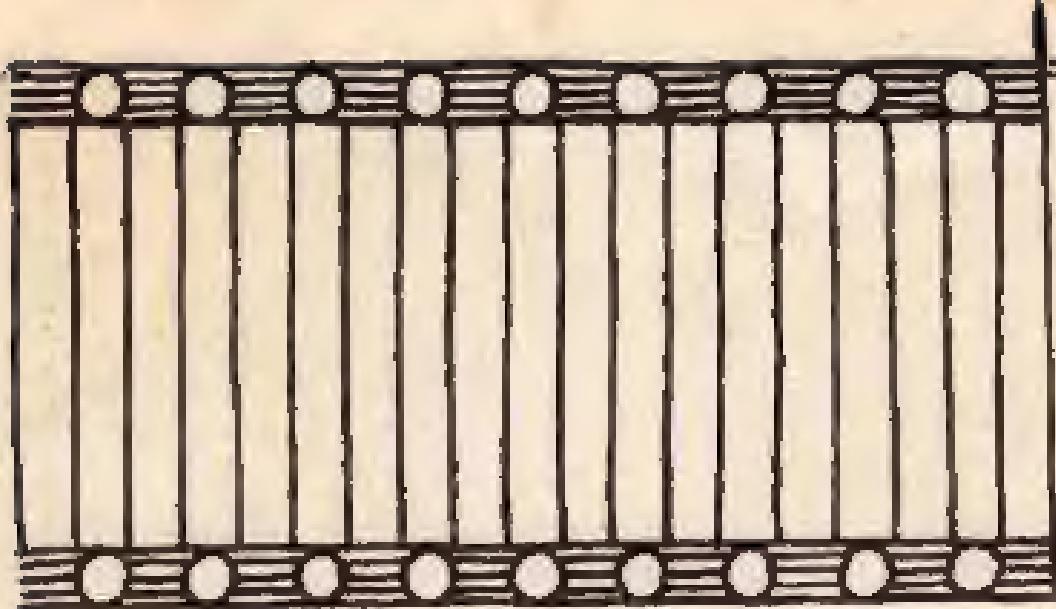
# HOW BABY ELEPHANT LEARNT TO DANCE

Translated from the Ukrainian  
by Lilia Tiller





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Once, a Baby Elephant lived in a Zoo. He had big fat legs and a short tail. And all I can say about Baby Elephant's trunk is that it was a very funny trunk indeed.

Baby Elephant would always look wistfully into the next cage, where Mrs. Ostrich lived with her Moppets. Mrs. Ostrich was the best dancer in the Zoo.

Near the Zoo stood a house. Often, lovely music could be heard coming from that house. Whenever the music began, Mrs. Ostrich would say to her Moppets:

"Time to dance. Kick your legs up. Faster! Higher!"

How Baby Elephant wished he could dance like that! Just to learn how to kick his legs, bob up and down and spin round, he would gladly stop taking sweets from people.



One night, when everybody was asleep, Baby Elephant tried to dance.

But Mrs. Gorilla did not like this at all.

"Why are you stamping so!" she said crossly.  
"I was having such a lovely dream about the jungles back in Africa. You dance like an elephant, anyway!"

Baby Elephant sighed sadly and stopped dancing.

One day he felt brave enough to ask Mrs. Ostrich, the best ballerina in the Zoo:

"Would you please teach me to dance?"

Mrs. Ostrich looked sharply at the fat Baby Elephant and said:

"Well, stand on one leg and bend the other."

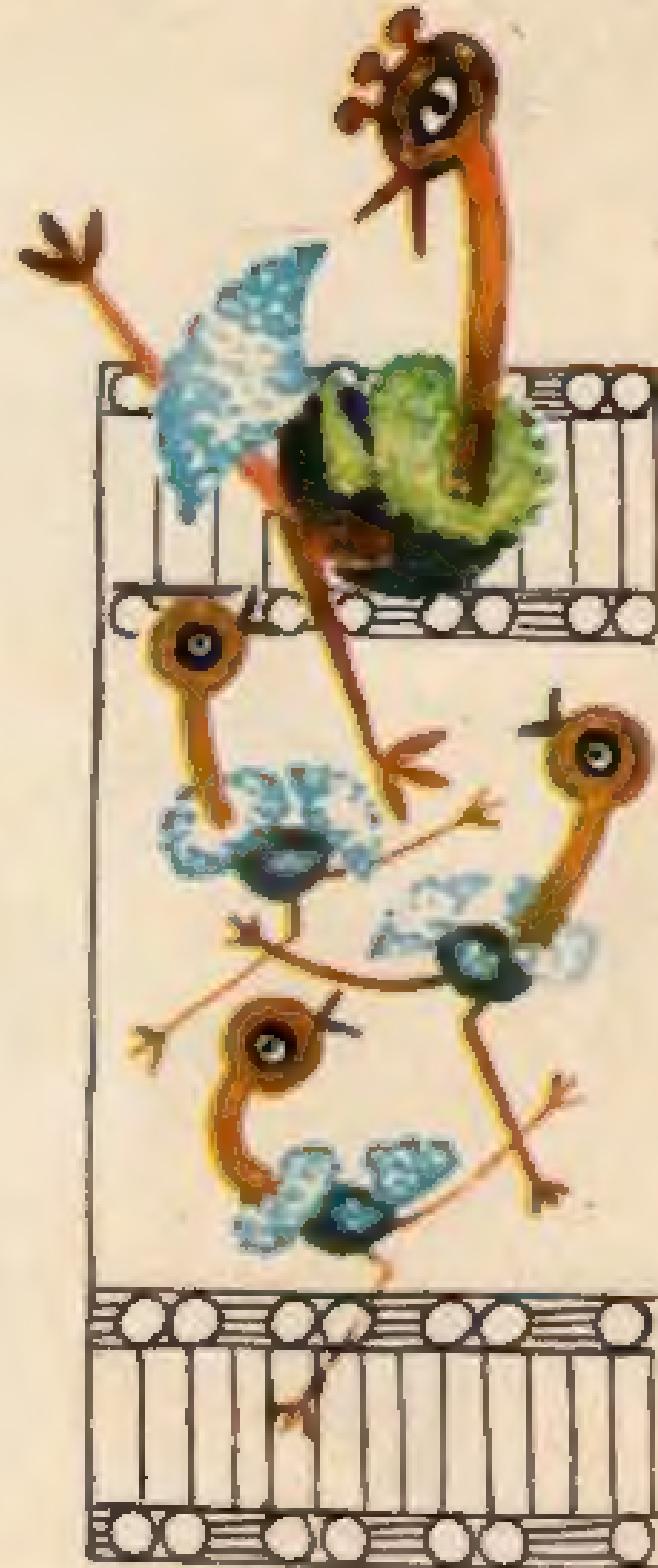
"And my third leg? What about my third leg?" said Baby Elephant worriedly.

"What third leg?" said Mrs. Ostrich angrily.

"With this one here," said Baby Elephant and raised his third leg. "But I still have one more," he added meekly and shifted his feet awkwardly.

"Oh!" Mrs. Ostrich now was very angry. "Dance with four! You move your legs like an elephant, anyway. Just look how my Moppets dance!"

Baby Elephant was so upset that he nearly burst into tears. But no elephant ever gives in once it makes up its mind. And our Baby Elephant, young as he was, was just as stubborn. He saw how the keeper locked the cage in the evening and just before daybreak opened the cage with his trunk and tip-toed out.



BALLET  
SCHOOL

Baby Elephant looked around, afraid of being seen, and then dashed to the house with the big windows from which he had so often heard the lovely music. Baby Elephant could not read at all, so how could he know that the sign on the door said "Ballet School".

Baby Elephant tried to turn the door-knob with his trunk but the door wouldn't open...

"Maybe it's too early," thought Baby Elephant. "I'll wait in the park..."

At last he heard music coming from the house. He hurried over, his heart beating wildly... But goodness me! Baby Elephant could not even squeeze his head through the doorway! He tried to go in backwards, but only his short tail went through.

What a pity! Whatever was he to do!

Baby Elephant looked through the big wide window. In the room little girls were dancing to the music. They were holding onto a bar fixed along the wall. They were bobbing up and down and lifting their graceful little legs.

Baby Elephant also started to bob up and down and lifted each of his four legs in turn. He was much happier here in the street — there was so much more room. And the music was simply lovely!

Now Baby Elephant looked around: was anybody watching how nicely he danced?

Yes, indeed! Some boys with schoolbags were standing near by. But they were all laughing at him!





"Look at Baby Elephant!"

"See, he's dancing! Isn't he funny!"

Baby Elephant grew sadder, and sadder and went slowly back to his cage in the Zoo. That night, when all the birds and animals were asleep, he began to weep bitterly. And then he sobbed and sighed and kept wiping his tears away with his trunk until sunrise.

In the morning, the Manager of the Zoo — I suppose he was, for everybody obeyed him — came up to his cage. With him was a short Grey-Haired Man wearing a straw hat.

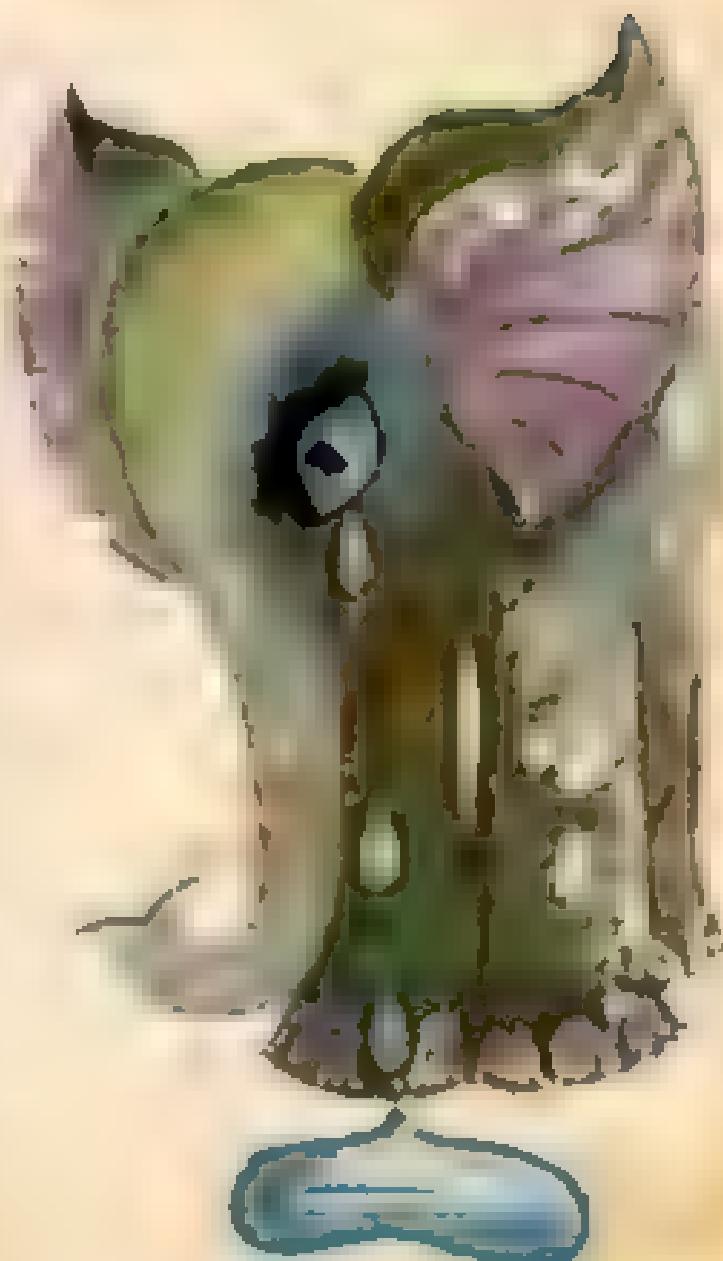
Baby Elephant was scared. Did the Manager of the Zoo know about his little outing? Baby Elephant had not asked the Manager of the Zoo to let him go and now he must be very angry.

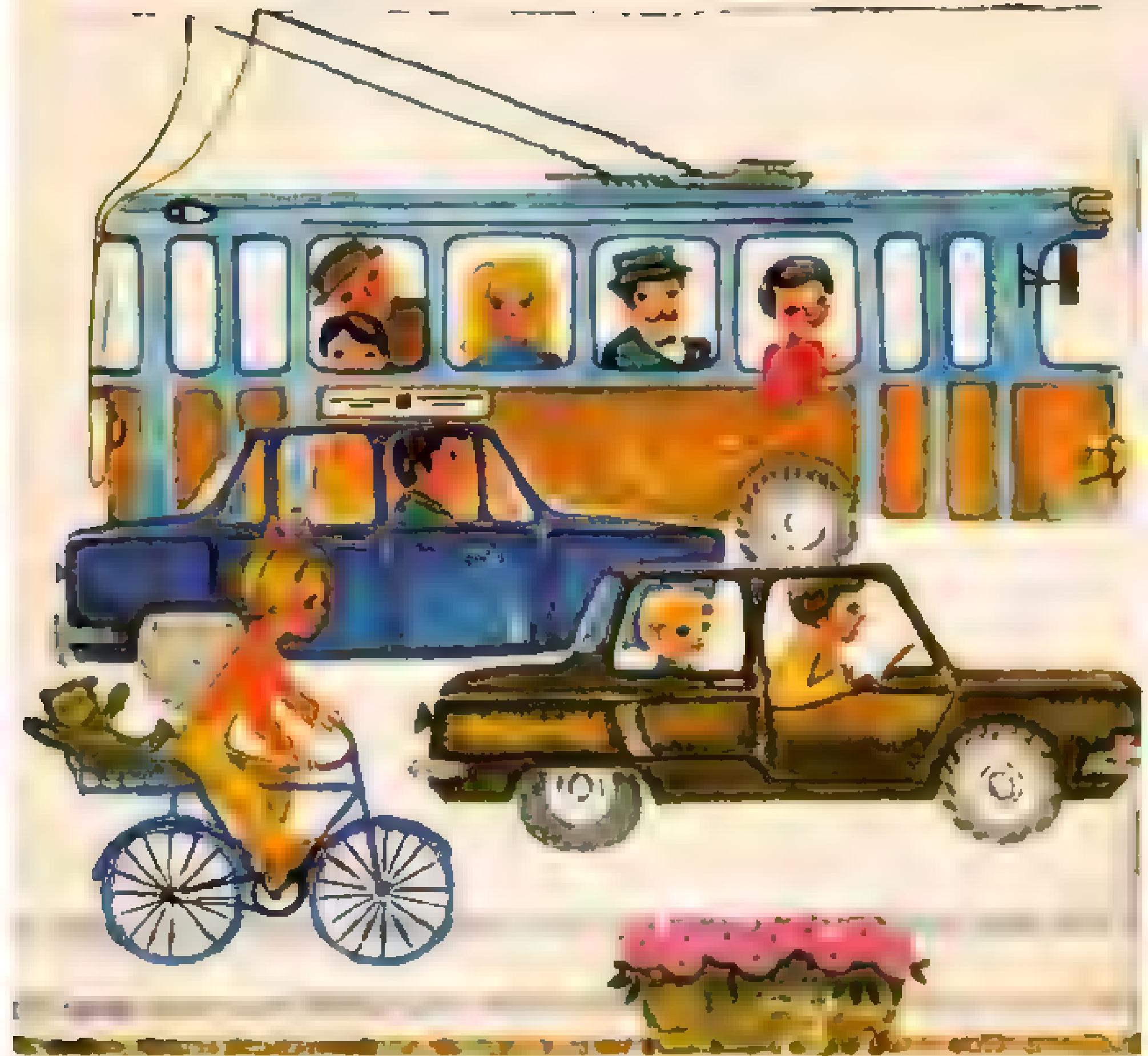
The two men talked for a while, then the one wearing the straw hat led Baby Elephant away from the Zoo.

Before Baby Elephant knew what had happened, they were in town and everybody and everything — even the trolley-buses, big and fat like grown-up elephants — made way for them.

"What's going on?" wondered Baby Elephant.  
"Where is he taking me?"

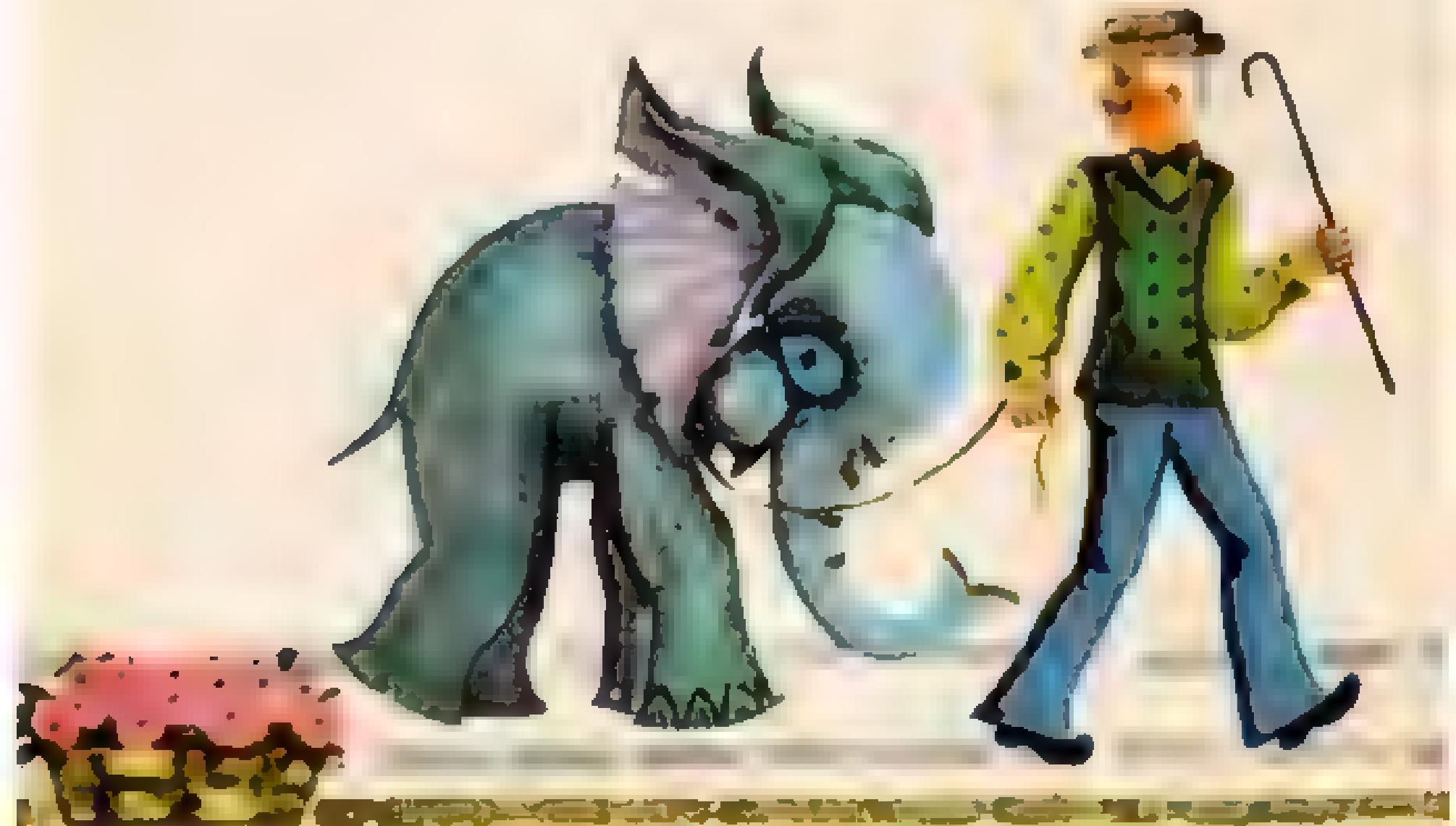
Baby Elephant didn't know that when he was dancing in the street the day before, the Gray-Haired Man had seen him through the window of a tram and after searching all day long had





Soon Baby Elephant saw a big building — round and very high. The gates were so big that Baby Elephant easily passed through. Lions with shaggy manes, striped tigers and grizzly bears were in cages everywhere. All of them greeted Baby Elephant with friendly grunts and growls and all of them looked at him with curiosity.

Suddenly, Baby Elephant found himself in the middle of a ring. It was covered with sand and looked like an African desert. There was a barrier round the ring and outside that, rows of seats reached right up to the circus top.





"This is a Circus. Now, I'll begin to train you," said the man who had taken Baby Elephant away from the Zoo.

The man waved to the musicians.

"Listen to the music, Baby Elephant, and do what I tell you. First, learn how to bend your knees correctly and point your toes..."

And so, Baby Elephant lived in the Circus and was trained by the Grey-Haired Man. Oh, it wasn't easy at all even though Baby Elephant loved to dance. Once, the Grey-Haired Man became very cross with him. This happened when Baby Elephant learnt to stand on his forefeet and lift his hind legs high in the air. From sheer joy Baby Elephant thought he could stand on his head and that is what he did!

But just as he stood on his head down he fell on his back with such a crash that the musicians stopped playing and looked down into the ring rather shocked. Oh, how it hurt, but Baby Elephant was so ashamed of himself that he kept his eyes glued to the ground.

"Who stands on his head when dancing?" asked the Grey-Haired Man. "That was very naughty of you! I'm teaching you to dance. I'm not teaching you tricks! You must obey me! It will soon be time for our first night."

Baby Elephant had never heard of a "first night" before. Afterwards, he asked Stripey the Tiger what a "first night" was.

"Oh!" Stripey the Tiger blinked his tawny eyes in awe. "So, you are going to have your first show!"





He wanted to say something else but from lack of words he only shuffled his feet awkwardly.

But Baby Elephant had heard enough to make his heart grow cold with fear.

At last the great day came. Baby Elephant peeped through the curtains. The rows of seats were packed with people.

A handsome man in a shiny black suit walked into the ring and told the people that they would now see a fantastic Baby Elephant — the Dancing Baby Elephant!

Baby Elephant was blinded by the spotlights. People were everywhere. The music boomed out.

Baby Elephant didn't know what to do. The music went on and on and the people kept watching, but all he did was... stand still!

Then he heard the gentle well-known voice:  
"Come on, Baby Elephant!"

It was the Grey-Haired Man.

"Easy does it, Baby Elephant. Put out your left front leg and tap with the right hind foot!"

The Grey-Haired Man waved to the musicians to slowly follow the dance.

Baby Elephant put out his left front leg and quickly tapped with his right hind foot, and felt much more sure of himself.

He looked at the people and wasn't afraid any more. Everybody was smiling. The orchestra was playing only for him. Then Baby Elephant began tapping away, keeping time with the music.

First, he tapped with all four feet. Then he stood on his hind legs, still tapping away, and clapped his front feet together. He even started to bob up and down.





All the people clapped and cheered.

"What a wonderful dancer!" they all shouted in glee.

When Baby Elephant stopped dancing and bowed he saw the same boys who had once laughed at him by that house with the big wide windows. Now, they were clapping very hard and shouting:

"Bravo! Bravo! Baby Elephant! You're a real dancer!"

Baby Elephant kept on bowing.

"Oh! Is it really true?" he thought. "I wonder what the best ballerina, Mrs. Ostrich, would say now!"





Юрий Феодосиевич Ярмыш  
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